



The above drawing by Nancy Borgman as it appeared in the Minnesota federation's publication, "The Roundup", illustrates the current craze among square dance leaders. "Good Night, Irene" has actually become a "Round Dance", a glorified Black Hawk Tango — Waltz type of a dance. "Open The Door Richard", and Mairsy Doats" were somehow overlooked.

"WHA HOPPEN" TO THE SQUARE DANCE?

During recent months I've been receiving many letters "beefing" (as one writer called it) about the present trends in square and folk dance. All seem to consider VILTIS as the only vanguard left which safeguards true and genuine traditions. It is a wonderful reputation to acquire and we are mighty proud of it. VILTIS is not on the market to make money. In fact, we don't. We rely entirely on subscriptions and renewals which we never fully collect to pay for a single issue. Therefore, money is not our object. Our object is sincerity and friendship. We like to be true to ourselves and to our readers. We "lick no one's boots" and we say what we mean, even if it means losing a few touchy subscribers. Truth prevails, inspite of it.

I didn't write anything too much about the square dance and the new creations previously, because I didn't get around to see them work. When one teaches continually it is hard to get away and see what others are doing. This summer and autumn, I tried to be on my own and go around to see "Is it true what they say about square dancing"?

Yes, square dancing, left the lowly "barn" and forsook the simple folk for whom the barn contained the daily bread and staff of life — ordinary life — it for highly painted and manicured "dame" and went "high class" and collegiate. No more can uncle Joe, aunt Sarah, cousin Abner and sister Suzy join into the circle and have an unhurried good time following calls which are not above their head. Now, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Smith, son Abney (less common) and Sussana Smith, will first

have to take lessons in square dancing, pay money so that they may decipher and distinguish the fifty different "doceys" and the fifty different "Allemands". They must know that "dos a dos, docey do, do sa do, do say doe (dough?), do paso," etc. ad nauseam are not the same thing, as are not the "allemands thar, allemand X, etc., etc."

Up until recently, I, along with many others, were wont to throw the entire blame of the creativity of so called "folk dances" entirely upon the shoulders of the North Californian folk dancers. After some investigation I discovered the picture to be greatly erroneous. The greatest part of the blame should be thrown on the shoulders of the square dancers and square dance leaders, particularly their prophets and sages.

Of late, the U. S. is blessed with an abundance of square dance callers. All one has to do is attend one session at a square and folk dance camp and he is a graduate. These ten day wonders are flooding the country and all making good money. Some clumsy oxen who look about as graceful as an elephant would be doing a Pas de Deux in ballet, are leaders!, and charge as little !!! as sixty dollars for an evening and as high as \$200. and all that their background consists of is attending one, or two possibly, institute sessions in California or other places. That is a crime! These ten day wonders, wanting to show off their ability, are usually the ones who flood the land with trash. It is thanks to them that they inspire their charges with the unhealthy thought of mind that European folk dancing is "unamerican". As in all cases of prejudice—ignorance is always the cause of prejudice—here too, their ignorance of European folk makes them into "Square Fascists". They take figures of European dances which they don't quite remember correctly, set them to American popular tunes, often, proudly attach their name to it, and there is a new brain storm, strickly American. In this case, their prohibition against doing folk dancing when dancing squares, is lifted, because, then, without contradiction (?), they are not doing folk dances, but American (???) rounds! This junk, mind you, is being stuffed and crammed down the throats of actually innocent and trusting pupils who come from great distances, pay big money to attend a camp and to learn — what?

The gall of those people is often admirable. To think that these choreographers, without any background to speak of, except perhaps one or two camps, who again, in turn, learned dances from others who had one or two sessions themselves, become authorities and the leading spirits of communities! (Why, if one would go to an ordinary but bona fide dancing school, which claims not to be any authority, but has a good background of dancing, having learned this art for years, can certainly do more for and give you a correct style (to boot) in your dancing). If you can get that in your own town, why then go to those camps?

The next thing noticed which takes place among folk dancers, due mainly by the poisoning of the above type of leaders, is the complete divorcing of the folk feeling the wholesome and friendly mixing of people. Their product is becoming intolerant to dances wherin they must give up their partners — namely, mixers. Women, especially, resent, claiming: "Why should I bring down my husband (or partner) and then have to dance with a girl (or with some kind of a clumsy "shlock")? (Men, usually never object dancing with someone else's wife, for a change.) The spirit of friendliness and sportsmanship is gone. They only want their

own set of square, or round dancers in which they will not have to be burdened with the inconvenience of a person, or couple, who does not know too well how to dance. They forget the time when they were new and needed help and appreciated getting it. Now, their appreciation has left them.

Also, because of the above "choreographers", we are very rapidly going back to a period where folk dancing will once again be banned as "Immoral". It is taking place already. In Ohio, one community has banned folk dancing from its lawn because folk dancing is now considered to be "immoral". New York State (Education Dept.) withdrew its funds toward the encouragement of public folk dancing because of its "uselessness". I can see why and this is only the beginning. Their type of folk dancing is useless. It breeds snobbery and a type of "fascism" — anti "people of other backgrounds". It is going back again to the stage when folk dancing will be taught in an elementary stage in the Phys. Ed. Department of Universities and Teacher Training Schools, who, even tho the dances were elementary, thanks to the Phys. Ed. teachers, they kept the dance alive during a period when they and only "foreigners" danced.

What can one do? What is one to do to safeguard traditions and to save the folk dance from further deterioration, to keep it on a high plane and to clean the field from all the thorny thistle now destroying well cultivated crop lands? VILTIS can't reach the masses. Its opposition certainly will not print my pleas for "coming to their senses". Let's hear suggestions.

We follow up with several (only several — space does not permit for more) letters by other readers. We omit all names purposely. VFB.

"As you know, the folk-dance game is pretty discouraging at times . . . It certainly is painful to me to see some of the horrible things that are passed off as "folk dancing", and to realize how ignorant of the real backgrounds of dance most of the people are who pass themselves off as teachers."

V. M. San Francisco, Cal:

"Did you know that the worst barrier to authenticity is just building up? Big names in the square dance field are traveling around the country holding "camps" at which for a week or two they instruct instructors. With no regard for standard calls, they are making response to calls so involved that no country bumpkin would have a chance. But what they are doing to other dances is really deplorable. These men frankly state that they have no interest in these dances, but since it means a livelihood to these men (names omitted), they give the people a pattern, in name at least similar to a dance done. How many of their pupils will be able to discern which is a folk dance and which is composed? To sell a book with the title *Anthony Adverse* but the pages being the story of *The Egg And I* must be illegal. Too bad the same procedure isn't illegal with regard to dances! Isn't there something you can do about it?"

B. D. Buffalo, N. Y :

"Honestly, I wish you could see some of the characters who teach square dancing. Sure, they can call well, but why do they call themselves teachers? When you see them do a couple dance it's kinda sad."

M. S. Seattle, Wash.

I read your comments on California dancing with some interest. I feel that what you said about the type of dances now done may apply to the Northern groups and to the more "advanced" Southern groups. We dance

strictly for pleasure, are moderate to poor dancers, and never demonstrate. These new ball room type dances are introduced, but to date none have stuck. If we went to ball room dance, there are plenty of places that specialize in it in the city.

We saw the Lithuanian group at Los Angeles county Fair in September. As usual they were very good. Seeing the ethnic groups perform always brings up one of your points to me. As folk dancers we should dance for recreation trying to learn and understand as much about the dances we do as possible, but recognizing that even a partial understanding of an ethnic dance means a lot of study and work and that we can never possibly get the feeling of all the various nationality dances we try to do. The ethnic groups probably don't mind us dancing in our own groups; but when we try to demonstrate we're sort of on slippery ground.

W. F. G., Willmington, Cal:

I agree with your views, for I am a victim of the new trend. As couple dances become more popular, and mixers less, those of us without regular partners find ourselves on the sidelines. Folk dancing used to be fun.

L. L. B. Grass Valley, California

IN WHICH CATEGORY ARE YOU?

Folk dancing is being too much looked upon as a block of soft concrete with everyone possessed with an urge to make his particular mark in it. There are six factions:

I EXHIBITIONISTS — those who think of folk dances only as means to bring laurels to themselves or their group for putting on a nice show. They have no mercy on the folk dances, but twist them and change them to suit the purpose of the moment, but the product presented is still considered a folk dance both by themselves and the duped audience.

II PURISTS — Opposed to them are those who prefer to omit easy dances from a fancy program rather than alter and adorn them so that they are no longer folk dances. The purists try to present honest-to-goodness folk dances in the demeanor of the people represented.

III EGOTISTS — those who say, "What is the difference how we do the dances? If we do a dance our way long enough, it will become a folk dance." Should they live in Podunk and alter a German dance, they illogically think they can create or change a German dance. Someone should inform them that it can only be a Podunk version of a German dance no matter how long they do it, unless it should spread, say far and wide, and become a United States version of that German dance.

IV COMPOSERS — those who are busy composing "American" (or other) dances and trying to pass them off as folk dances. (To misappropriate the name of a folk dance for a composed number is to imply that it is a folk dance.) Folk dances are antiques preserved until, but not fresh, today. Should some of the modern novelty dances have the quality to perpetuate them, they might eventually become folk dances, but only time can determine which of these dances has that quality, except that if a dance is similar to a dozen others already better known, or is set to a particular popular tune headed for Tin Pan Alley's graveyard, its chance of perpetuation is slim. Today such dances belong in the dance hall or dance studio. A conscientious folk dancer doesn't require them for a pastime, at least not when he is folk dancing.